CHAPTER 9. THE LATE GROUP

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Late Group assignments are based on the dating of artifacts from grave shafts, on stratigraphic relationships, and, most importantly, on burial location, as discussed in Chapter 4. Reasons to place this group in the period from 1776 to the close of the cemetery include the destruction of the fence marking the cemetery's north edge and likely usurpation of Rutgers property during the British occupation; and northward pressure caused by military uses of the ground to the south (for a fuller discussion, see Chapter 4). The frequency of coffin-less burials and the preponderance of men to the north of the fence post alignment is also best explained by the circumstances of the Revolutionary War and the British occupation of New York, as will be discussed in section 9.C.

The town and its population are characterized, and then the mortuary sample and related material culture are described, followed by a discussion of the spatial distribution of excavated graves and descriptions of some unique and unusual burials in this temporal group.

9.A. The town

The American War for Independence profoundly disrupted the city's streets, homes, and cemeteries. British troops took the city in the first months of the war and occupied it for seven years. Conflagrations, beginning with the Great Fire of September 1776, ravaged the downtown area, destroying huge swaths of the built environment. Public spaces were taken over for military use. Soldiers were billeted in barracks on the Common and in private homes appropriated for army use, including Isaac Teller's on the western side of the African Burial Ground. Thousands of prisoners of war languished in makeshift prisons and on prison ships, most of them perishing before hostilities ended. Loyalists from the hinterland relocated to the city, and over the course of the war refugees streamed into town (on New York in general during and after the war see Burrows and Wallace 1999:223-287; on the presence and role of Africans in the city in these years, see the African Burial Ground History Report [Medford 2004:204-215]; Hodges 1999:139-161; and Foote 2004:212-216).

Africans from New York and New Jersey escaped from households sympathetic to the patriot cause and joined the British forces in the months leading up to the war. They were responding to Lord Dunmore's proclamation freeing enslaved and indentured servants who supported the crown. During the occupation of New York City, thousands of blacks from surrounding areas and from distant colonies found their way to refuge

here. Those confiscated by the British from patriot households during the war were brought to the city, and Loyalist refugees brought their own enslaved Africans with them. The British used hundreds of African workers, mainly runaways, during the occupation, paying wages (or, sometimes, rum) for various types of labor. Housing was in seriously short supply, but some were billeted in "Negro Barracks" (appropriated buildings), several in the vicinity of upper Broadway (British Headquarters Papers, No. 10349). A "Black Brigade" had been organized when the British took the town, and Blacks brought in from other colonies joined its ranks. The "Black Pioneers" were commissioned in 1776 to serve as guards, pilots, spies, and interpreters to the Native Americans (Hodges 1999:147). Blacks were used mainly as teamsters, but also for cleaning the streets and in the fuel and ordnance departments; they rebuilt the infrastructure burned in the Great Fire, were used for foraging expeditions, and worked as pilots on harbor craft. Numerous opportunities for paid work were seized by Africans during this time, but harsh exploitation of the enslaved also characterized the occupation. Severe wartime shortages, especially of food, fuel, and lumber for building, made life in the city difficult for all.

By an agreement negotiated with Washington, when the British evacuated New York in 1783, the Blacks who officially left with them were inspected and registered. This was the famous "Book of Negroes" (British Headquarters Papers, No. 10427), listing some 3,000 men, women and children, many who testified that they had escaped from households in New York or other colonies and come to New York, or had served in the British forces during the war. Approximately 80% of the black refugees listed were from southern colonies, 20% from New York and New Jersey (Foote 1991:342-343). It is estimated that perhaps a thousand additional Blacks evacuated with the British in private vessels (Quarles 1961:172), for a total of approximately 4,000.

It is likely that most blacks who died during the occupation, whatever their residence or status, were buried in the African Burial Ground, though Trinity's small "Negroes" cemetery on Church Street was probably available to church members, of whom there were many among Anglican loyalist families. Reportedly, many black refugees also joined the church (Hodges 1999:146-147).

Dissenting Christian denominations also were attracting black members. The John Street Methodist Church reported membership of 25 blacks in 1786, 70 in 1789, 135 in 1791, and 155 by 1795 (Walls 1974:40-46). After the war black churchgoers increasingly moved to separate from white congregations, where restrictions on their full participation as members and preachers continued unabated. A pivotal moment in the history of the black church in America was the formation in New York of a separate black Methodist meeting in 1795.[1] One of the galvanizing issues behind the separatist movement in this

[1] In the 1780s the John Street congregation had several "Negro Classes" with men and women separated, as was the church practice. Several of the men who would emerge as leaders of the black community and founders of a separate black congregation were in Class Number 31, and in Class Number 28 was Peter Williams, Sr., the church's sexton and one of its gravediggers, who worked at John Street to earn his own freedom. Black Methodists met in a house on Cross Street in 1795. In 1801, they incorporated the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and erected their own chapel, with a burial ground as well as a vault, on Church Street (see Walls 1974).

and other churches was probably the demise of the African Burial Ground, which, we believe, had heretofore served as a focal religious institution in New York's African community.

A new soldiers' barracks erected at present-day Chambers Street and the use of the ground behind the barracks for a cemetery by the British (see Figure 2.12) would have constricted the African cemetery and possibly pushed it northward. Members of the city's African community might have appropriated the southern edge of the Rutgers Farm (the old Calk Hook Farm) for burials at this time. As discussed in Chapter 4, the British reportedly destroyed the fence that had marked the boundary between the burial ground and the Rutgers/Barclay property; that property may have been left un-leased, or held in uncertain possession, during the war. The houses within the Van Borsum patent were either destroyed or were occupied by various tenants, also in uncertain possession, during the war once Teller was removed (Johnson 1853-59(9):174-77).

The growth of the town in the decade following the war is reflected in the 1797 Taylor-Roberts Plan (Figure 2.17). Streets and building lots were laid out northward from Chambers Street and in 1787 the Barclays began selling off lots along Duane Street, on the northern edge of the African Burial Ground. Some time soon after, a new fence was probably constructed, once again delimiting the area Africans could use. Within seven years claimants to the Van Borsum patent were able to have the remainder of the cemetery land surveyed and sold in lots (see Chapter 2).

Depredations on the African Burial Ground from medical students seeking cadavers in the 1780s led to forceful protests from the city's African community leaders. Besides providing a window on the development of black leadership in the town, the protests revealed the vulnerability of what we believe was still the community's most important institution at the time, their cemetery. As explained in Chapter 2, at least one attempt was made to provide a more secure place of burial (Mr. Scipio Gray's plot on Gold Street), but that, too, was subject to depredation. Africans were particular targets of this practice, as attested by numerous newspaper accounts, and were the first to raise a public protest. Public anger against doctors was first aroused when a free African-American man's letter was printed in the *New-York Daily Advertiser* on February 16, 1788.[2] The author suggested that a law be passed prohibiting dissection of any but criminals so that "a stop might be put to this horrid practice here; and the mind of a very great number of my fellow-liberated, or still enslaved Blacks quieted." The closing of the letter is an intimation of rising concern on the part of the aggrieved African community. His next letter contained a less veiled threat: "students of physick" were warned that "their lives may be the forfeit of their temerity should they dare to persist in their robberies" (*New-York Daily Advertiser*, February 28, 1788). A group of free and enslaved black men also petitioned the Common Council to protect the graves of blacks (Common Council Papers, Petitions, 1788[87]). Black leaders thus pursued simultaneous strategies: appealing to the authorities and threatening to meet violence against the dead with

[2] The writer's name was omitted "for reasons," as the publisher stated, "which must be obvious to the author."

violence on the streets. A general riot that became known as the "Doctors' Riot" erupted in April, showing that New Yorkers of European heritage were as incensed about grave robbing as Africans, and suggests that for people of all backgrounds the desecration of the dead was a particularly heinous crime.

9.B. The population

Census

African New Yorkers made up 14.3% of the population before the war, but were only 9.9% of the city total in 1790. This drop does not reflect a decrease in the black population, which was essentially the same in 1771 and 1790. Rather, European immigration accelerated following the war, their numbers increasing by 10,000.

Census figures for Africans are available for points in time bracketing the war years (1771 and 1786) and for 1790, which can be considered the eve of the African Burial Ground's closing (Table 9.1). There was also one count taken during the occupation, in 1779 (Elliott Papers, cited in Hodges 1999:150). Fluctuations during the war years went unrecorded, however. We do know that three to four thousand blacks left with the British in 1783 and that most of them were from out of town. The 1779 count seems low; it may be inaccurate, or it is possible the numbers of fugitive/refugee Africans swelled after that year.

Table 9.1.
Black population by age and sex, 1771-1790

Year	Adults		Children		Age for children	Label in census
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)		"Blacks"
1771	932*	1,085	568	552	<16	
1779	Total: 1,951					"Blacks"
	males	females	No separate count of children.			"Slaves"
1786	896	1,207				
	free	enslaved	No count by gender or age.			"All other free persons" and "Slaves"
1790	1,036**	2,056				

*Includes 42 men over 60.
**Includes 678 living in free black households and 349 living in white-headed households. In 1790 about half of the enslaved (1170 persons) and about half of the free blacks living in white-headed households lived with merchants, artisans, or retail tradesmen (White 1991:7).
Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909); White (1991:126); for 1779, Elliott Papers, cited in Hodges (1999:150).

In addition to the census figures, data on residential patterns of both enslaved and free blacks in New York are available. Shane White, by analyzing the census and city directories, has been able to locate most households where people of African descent lived (Figure 9.1). The extent of slaveholding in the early federal era is evident.

Figure 9.1.
Locations of free Black households (top) and slaveholding households (bottom) in New York in 1790. Arrows point to the location of the African Burial Ground. Source: White (1991:15, 172).

Numbers of free blacks in New York are difficult to reconstruct for the period before 1790. Since the number of enslaved persons in the 1786 census is roughly equal to the number of enslaved in 1790, it is possible the free blacks were counted with the white population in 1786. Many came to New York during the war as fugitives and stayed on. Others were the small number of free blacks whose families had been living in the city for many years, even generations. Free blacks were overwhelmingly concentrated in the Montgomerie Ward, especially along Fair, Gold, and Beekman Streets near St. George's Chapel, where Scipio Grey worked, and adjacent to which the African Free School was founded in 1789 (see Rothschild 1990:100-101).

There was a preponderance of black women over men in counts from both before and after the war. Child-to-woman ratios cannot be calculated except for 1771, when about one child per adult female was counted.

Mortuary sample

Late Group burials, numbering 114, are listed in Table 9.2. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. "N/a" in the coffin column indicates that the bones were severely disturbed or redeposited so that coffin presence/absence was not determined. The distribution of Late Group graves is shown on Figures 9.2a-d. Profiles by age and sex are graphed in Figures 9.3 and 9.4. It is possible men predominate in this temporal group because they were more likely than women to remain in, or flee to, the occupied town, and because they were volunteers or conscripts in the British army.

Table 9.2.
Late Group burials

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preser-vation	Coffin
B001	20	25	female?	94	2	82.5	y	hexagonal
B002	27	42	male		11	43.5	n	n/a
B006	25	30	male?	91	15	87.5	y	hexagonal
B012	35	45	female	83	12	89.5	y	rectangle?
B014	0	0.5	undete	89	12	89.5	y	shared
B015	11	18	undete	105	-5	103.5	n	unident.
B020	45	50	male		0	85	n	no coffin
B028			undete		-2	83	y	unident.
B036			female		-5	87.5	n	unident.
B037	45	55	male	102	20	65	y	hexagonal
B040	50	60	female	94	10	65	y	hexagonal
B051	24	32	female	118	10	75	y	hexagonal
B058	3.5	4.5	undete	93	15	65	y	rectangle
B059	0	0.25	undete	90	15	65	y	hexagonal
B063	35	45	male	91	15	70	y	hexagonal
B065	0	0.49	undete	90	10	75	y	hexagonal?
B071	25	35	female	102	10	75	y	hexagonal
B076	25	55	male	112	10	75	y	no coffin
B086	6	8	undete	91	18	74	y	hexagonal
B095	7	12	undete	76	51	94.5	y	hexagonal
B097	40	50	male	97	20	81	y	hexagonal
B099	6	10	undete	78	70	91.5	y	unident.
B117	0	0	undete		77	91.5	n/a	n/a
B125			female?	89	52	64.5	n	unident.
B131			undete	90	76.5	91.5	n	unident.
B132	25	30	male	98	61.5	64.5	y	hexagonal
B134	40	50	female	106	85	62.5	y	hexagonal
B135	30	40	male	100	70	70	y	hexagonal
B137	25	35	undete	100	75	63	y	unident.
B138	3	5	undete	98	86	67.5	y	rectangle
B147	55	65	male	81	56.5	70.5	y	hexagonal
B150	20	28	female	117	80	70.5	y	no coffin

Table 9.2.
Late Group burials

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preser-vation	Coffin
B151	35	45	male	138	83	67.5	y	hexagonal
B152			undete	110	67	55.5	n	unident.
B153			female?	111	74	54.5	y	hexagonal
B157			female?		81.5	53.5	n	n/a
B158	20	30	male	111	92	63	y	no coffin
B162	35	45	male	109	51.5	55	n	unident.
B164	8	13	undete	97	91	52.5	y	tapered
B165			undete	108	73	62.5	y	no coffin
B166	0.5	1	undete	111	92.5	55.5	y	rectangle
B170	7	11	undete	90	65	96	y (no cranium)	unident.
B171	44	60	male	114	99.5	53.5	y	hexagonal
B172	25	35	female	118	88	40.5	y	no coffin
B173	0.25	0.75	undete	121	101	57	y	rectangle
B174	17	18	male	115	90	60.5	y	hexagonal
B178			male		57	62	n	n/a
B179	25	30	male	110	98	46.5	y	hexagonal
B180	11	13	undete	111	97.5	50	y	hexagonal
B181	20	23	male	86	115	66	y	no coffin
B183	0.63	1.13	undete		113.5	50	y	hexagonal
B184	1	1.5	undete	121	108.5	52	y	four-sided
B185	21	23	male		122	54.5	y	no coffin
B186	0	0.17	undete	124	110	47.5	y	hexagonal
B187	1.5	4	undete	112	119.5	52.5	y	hexagonal
B188	26	32	undete	95	52.5	58.5	n	n/a
B190	0.38	0.88	undete	112	100.5	55	y	hexagonal
B191	25	30	male	109	87.5	56.5	y	no coffin
B192	40	60	female	116	101.5	67	y	hexagonal
B193	30	48	male	109	101.5	65.5	y	no coffin
B194	30	40	male	104	84	50.5	y	hexagonal
B195	30	40	female	100	63	81.5	y	hexagonal
B196	20	24	undete	90	56	83	y	hexagonal
B197	45	55	female	77	57.5	76	y	hexagonal
B199	30	40	female	112	80	73.5	y	no coffin
B201	1.5	3.5	undete	101	70.5	59.5	y	rectangle
B203	12	18	undete	83	77	59	y	hexagonal
B204			female?		98	77.5	n	n/a
B205	18	20	female	108	102	59.5	y	hexagonal
B207	25	35	female?	93	95	78.5	y	tapered
B208	0.5	1	undete		96	77	n	unident.
B209	40	50	male	117	94	42	y	hexagonal
B210	35	45	male	88	116	46	y	no coffin
B211			male?	95	79.5	77	y	no coffin

Table 9.2.
Late Group burials

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preser-vation	Coffin
B214	45	55	male	99	63.5	79.5	y	hexagonal
B217	17	19	male	100	122.5	64.5	y	hexagonal
B223	25	35	female	101	76.5	66.5	y	no coffin
B225	0.5	1.25	undete	112	95.5	64.5	y	four-sided
B228			male?	85	55	86	n	hexagonal
B230	55	65	female	120	106	45.5	y	hexagonal
B236	4	5	undete	90	53.5	84.5	y	hexagonal
B241	55	65	female	94	121	54.5	y	hexagonal
B242	40	50	female	90	117	49.5	y	hexagonal
B243	40	50	male	105	121	57.5	y	no coffin
B244	5	9	undete	104	90	51.5	y	four-sided
B252	1	2	undete	115	95.5	64.5	y	hexagonal
B257	30	40	male	100	64.5	72.1	y	other
B259	17	19	female?	105	102	40.5	y	hexagonal
B262	15	17	male?	94	120	38.5	y	no coffin
B266	25	35	female	105	113.5	38.5	y	hexagonal
B276	20	24	female	108	118.5	35.5	y	no coffin
B278	45	55	male	116	103	42	y	no coffin
B297	30	40	male	106	117.5	62.5	n	unident.
B299	40	50	male	80	123.5	68.5	y	hexagonal
B305	-0.33	0.33	undete	109	122	57	y	hexagonal
B309	20	25	male		143.5	62	y	no coffin
B313	45	55	male	102	114.5	31.5	y	hexagonal
B322			female	99	140	64.5	n	n/a
B323	19	30	male		128.5	45	y	no coffin
B325	25	35	male	99	137.5	63.5	y	hexagonal
B327	35	45	male	98	129	48.5	y	no coffin
B329			male	85	128.5	56	y	no coffin
B329.1			undete		128.5	56	n	n/a
B330	28	58	male		140	58.5	n	n/a
B331	30	35	undete		137	58	n	n/a
B337	40	50	male	116	130	37	y	no coffin
B342	25	35	female?	104	129	50	y	hexagonal
B343	19	23	male	92	130	59.5	y	hexagonal
B346	50	70	female	117	138.5	57.5	y	hexagonal
B354	35	45	male	93	129.5	44.5	y	hexagonal
B363	1	2	undete	124	135	49.5	y	hexagonal
B364	25	35	male	90	143.5	44.5	y	no coffin
B369	40	50	male	83	131	54	y	no coffin
B386	0	0.3	undete	101	121.5	48	y	unident.

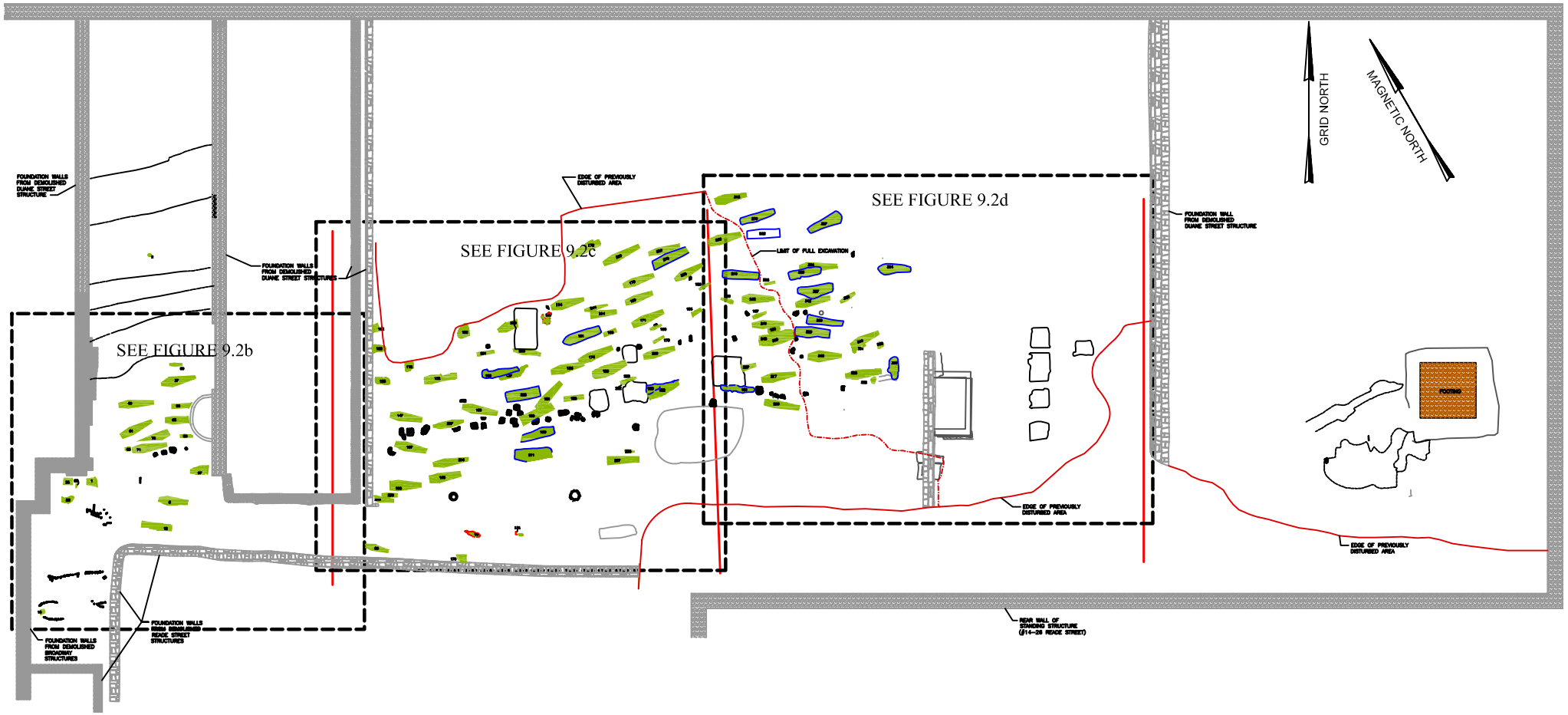

Figure 9.2.a
Excavated Late Group Burials
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

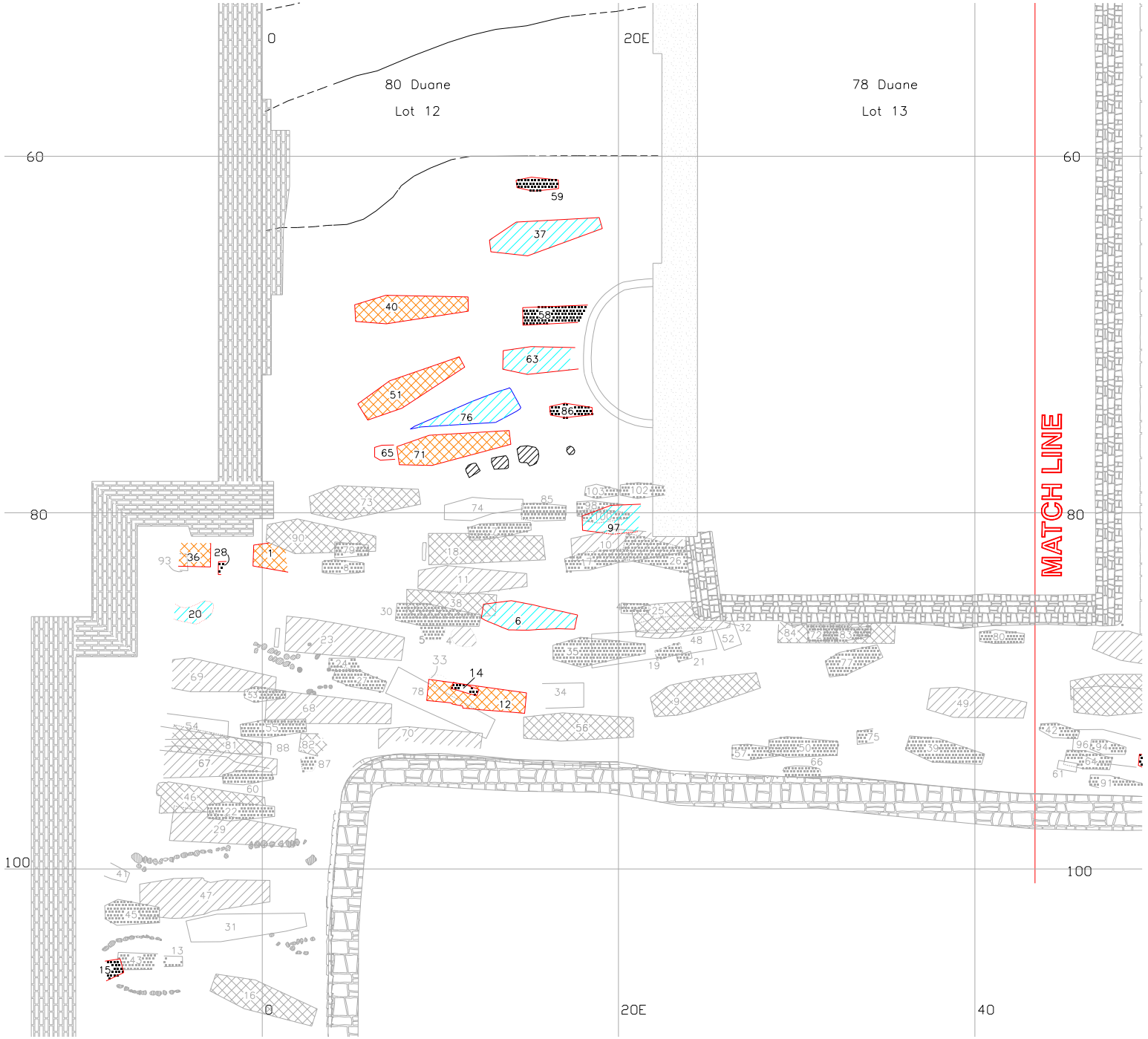

Figure 9.2.b
Late Group Burials, Western Area
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

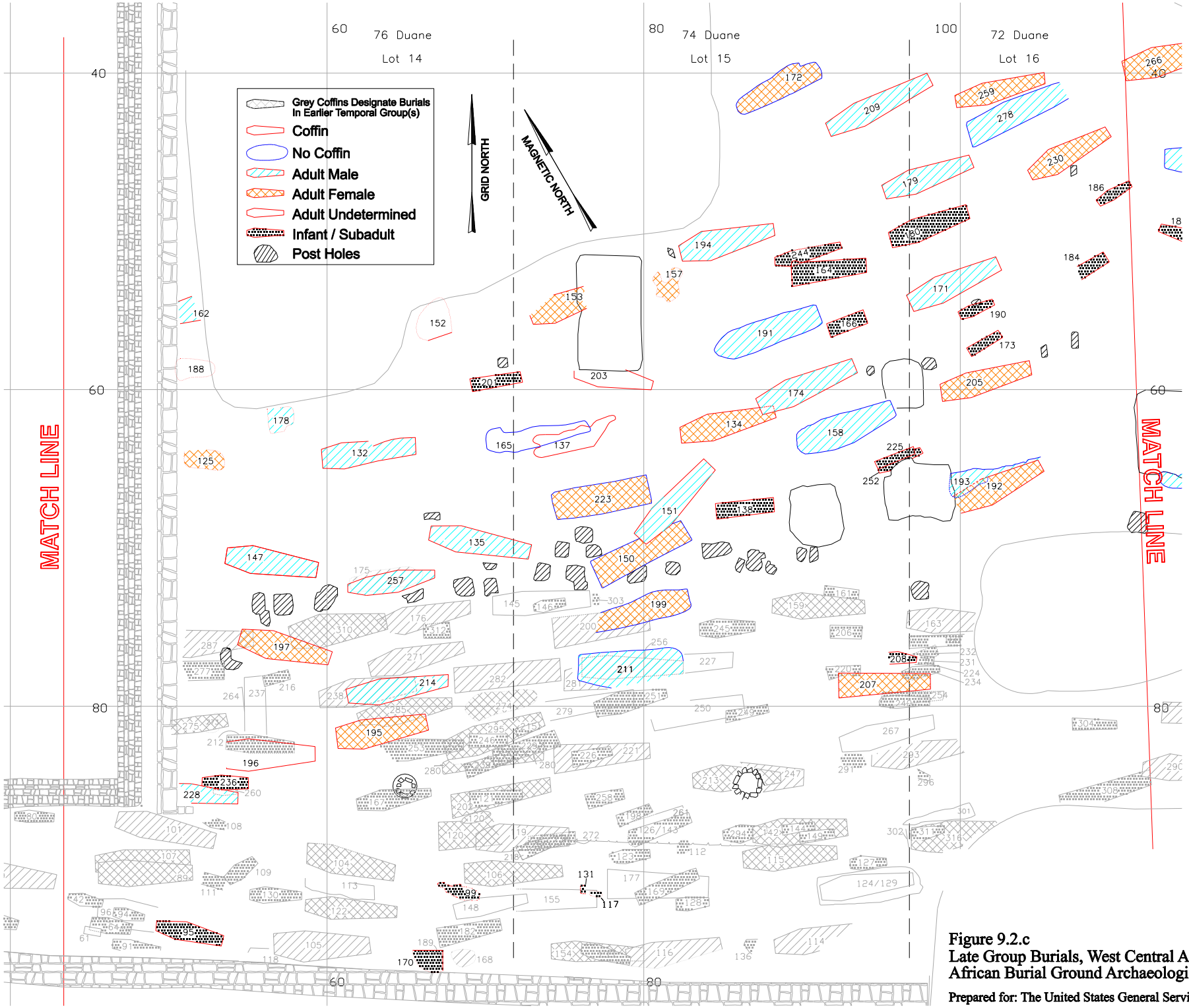

Figure 9.2.c
Late Group Burials, West Central Area
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

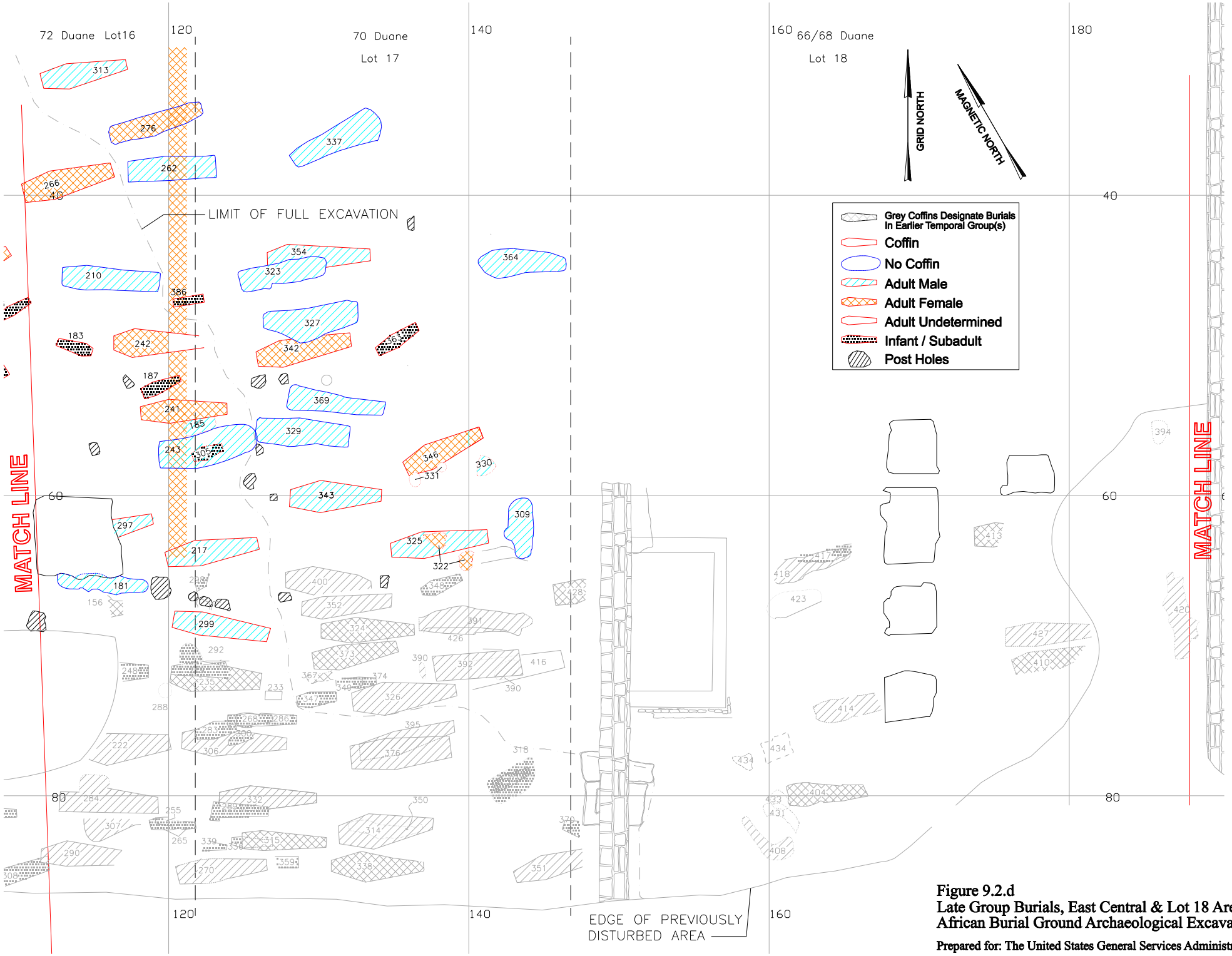

Figure 9.2.d
Late Group Burials, East Central & Lot 18 Areas
African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation

Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

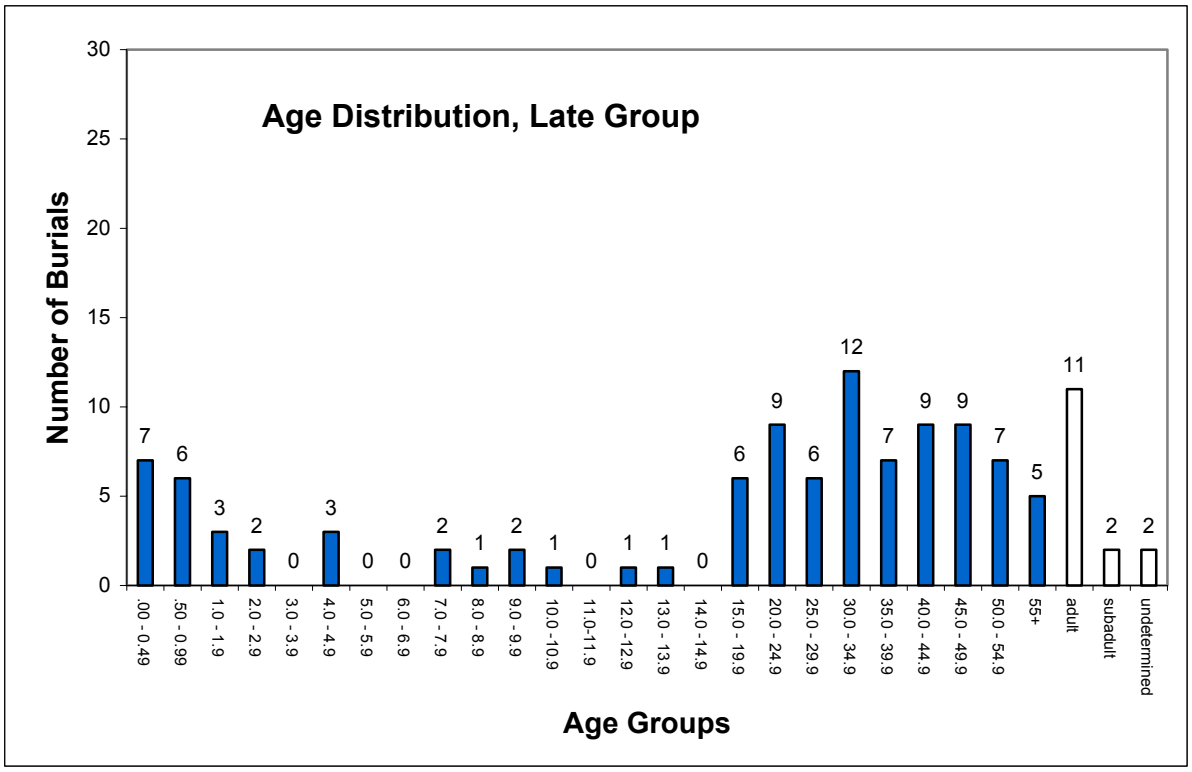

Figure 9.3.
Age profile, Late Group. White bars are individuals whose age could not be determined (includes only burials from which remains were recovered).

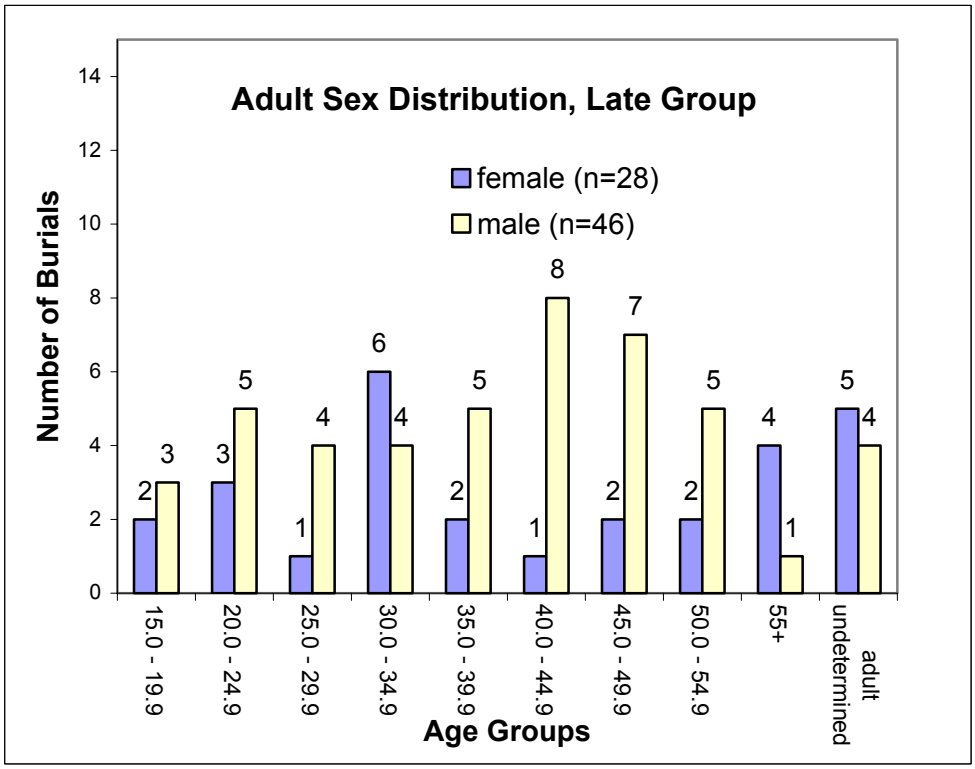

Figure 9.4.
Adult sex distribution, Late Group.

9.C. Mortuary material culture

Coffins and burials without coffins

Most graves without coffins, most of which fall to the north of the fence alignment, have been assigned to this last period of the cemetery's use. In Chapter 5 we suggested three possible explanations for burial without a coffin: 1) the inability of the family and friends of the deceased to afford a coffin or the refusal of an enslaved person's household head to provide it; 2) burial under some kind of special circumstance; 3) or adherence to a distinctive funeral practice.

A culturally distinctive funeral program may be the explanation for burial without coffins, but there is no evidence, either documentary or archaeological, to illuminate this possibility. Though coffins were not used in most African cultures of our period, there are no other features of the New York burials that point to specific cultural origins. For example, while we know that there were probably Muslims among New York's African population, and in strict adherence to Islamic law they would not have used coffins by choice, body orientation and the presence of personal items argues against Muslim practice. The other explanation based on distinctive funeral practice is that these were poor church members who were brought to the cemetery in a "parish coffin" – used to transport the deceased but retained by the church for repeated use. The growth in the late period of black Christian congregations, especially at the Anglican and Methodist churches, may support this explanation. Proper burial facilities were given priority by 18th century African American benefit societies and by early leaders of the black churches, including in New York, but whether a church coffin would have been seen as adequate is not known.

There is one obvious circumstance affecting the provision of coffins. The disruptions of the war caused shortages in supplies, particularly wood for fuel and building. Even obtaining sufficient scrap lumber to fashion a coffin for one's own kin might have been difficult. This explanation supports the dating of coffin-less burials to the period of the occupation.

We hypothesize that another special circumstance leading to coffin-less burial was not a lack of *means*, but a lack of *people* to see to these individuals' funeral arrangements. If the burials took place during the Revolution, the deceased may not have had time enough to form deep social bonds in the local community. They may have been soldiers, laborers in the employ of the British forces, or refugees, and they may have been in the city for only a short while. Typically when someone in the New York African community died, the provision of a coffin was considered a minimum standard of proper treatment. Even outsiders, in earlier periods, may have been afforded this minimum through the pooled resources of an established community (which took in escapees or transient free blacks), or, if enslaved, through their slaveholders who were obliged by custom to provide it. But during the war, with severe disruptions in community life and the huge influx of outsiders, we can imagine strangers dying with no people of their own and no local group able to take care of their funeral.

Table 9.3.
Late Group burials without coffins, by sex and age[3]

Age Group	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	Adult, undeter-mined	Tot.
Female		2		2	1					**5**
Male	1	4	2	1	1	3	4	1	2	**19**
Undeter-mined									1	**1**

The fact that the coffin-less burials are all of adults lends support to the idea that these burials held transients. Children were unlikely to be here alone, and therefore when a child died there was probably someone to see to its burial.[4] The predominance of men in coffin-less burials also supports the interpretation: black soldiers and refugees who became laborers for the British would have been buried at the African Burial Ground.

This is not to deny the formation of families among Revolutionary War refugees in New York, for there is in fact evidence of this process. For example, the lists of blacks evacuated with the British in 1783 provide information on several marriages of men and women from distant places who met in the occupied city (Foote 1991:370-75; Kruger 1985:666-73). But many deaths must have occurred among those who had not yet had opportunities to find kin, acquire spouses, make friends, join a religious group, or otherwise form bonds with a local community.

The lumber shortage during the war cautions us against over-interpreting the structural niche of occupants of coffin-less burials. Even if families and friends were on hand and wished to provide adequate funerals, the means may not have been available. Still, we believe that the provision of a coffin for *most* of the deceased speaks to the efforts of mourners to provide that item even in the face of shortages. Burials without coffins may therefore represent individuals for whom less effort was made, because they were strangers or because the family's or household's means were too limited.

Despite the possible hindrances, there were three times as many Late Group burials with coffins than without (79 coffins). Hexagonal coffins are typical of the late period. Only three of the adult coffins with recognizable shapes were not six-sided: a tapered coffin

[3] Two coffin-less burials of men (Burials 391 and 357) are in the Late-Middle Group (see Chapter 8), and these, too, may be from the period of the British occupation.

[4] Poor preservation of child burials may also account for the lack of coffin-less children's graves recorded. Even with *no* dental preservation, the outlines of graves should have been discernable. Still, if excavation failed to turn up any evidence of either a coffin or skeletal remains it is possible no burial would have been recorded, and disturbances to the site may have obscured such graves beyond recognition. A number of infant's or small children's coffins contained minimal or no skeletal material; if a coffin aided preservation at least to some degree we would expect even less skeletal survival for coffin-less juveniles. The degree of skeletal preservation for individuals 15 and older does not appear to have been significantly affected by the presence of coffins.

(Burial 207), a possible rectangular coffin (Burial 12), and a possible eight-sided coffin with a two-piece headboard (Burial 257). Even among the children and infants, 12 out of 21 recognizable coffin shapes were hexagonal. One adult, in Burial 207, had a four-sided tapering coffin, the shape we have considered to be typical of the early period. While the presence of a sherd of pearlware in the soil within the cranium and the fact that the burial overlay many children's graves force us to consider it late, it is possible Burial 207 has been assigned incorrectly. Burial 12, which also had pearlware in the grave shaft fill soil, had a coffin for which it is difficult to determine the shape, though it appears to have been four-sided.

Other artifacts

Other types of material culture directly associated with Late Group burials included pins, jewelry, plain and decorative buttons and cuff links, and miscellaneous items including coins. Fifty-three percent (60 out of 114) of the Late Group burials had at least one pin. Shrouding was probably typical, though 16 individuals had some evidence of clothing (buttons, cuff links at the wrists, or an aglet). Little in the way of personal adornment was recovered from Late Group burials, as was the case for the excavated cemetery as a whole. A woman was laid to rest wearing a ring with glass insets (Burial 242), an infant with a glass and wire filigree ornament (Burial 186), and a young child with a string of black beads looped at the waist (Burial 187).

Sixteen of the 36 burials with clothing items that were clearly associated with the deceased were in the Late Group; more than half of the buttons recovered at the African Burial Ground were from Late Group burials. Particular types of clothing are suggested in Burials 6 (a jacket), 181 (trousers or breeches), 203 (breeches), and 259 (breeches). One man had cuff links at each wrist (Burial 158) and another was buried with an enameled cuff link face (Burial 211); a possible cuff link was recorded for Burial 181.[5]

The greater frequency of buttons and cuff links in later burials raise questions about the increased use of street clothes as burial attire (see Chapter 12). There is a caveat, however: since buttons have in some cases provided the rationale for placing burials in the Late Group (Burial 6, for example), a comparison of button/no button burials within and across temporal groups is suspect. In other words, there are probably burials that date to the late period but that have not been identified as late because they have no artifacts and are not assignable spatially or stratigraphically. Such burials would increase the frequency of button-less burials in the Late Group.

"Miscellaneous" items such as coins, shells, and pipes were also more prominent in Late Group burials than in burials from earlier groups (see Chapter 14). Since these items were not used to date burials, the comparative frequency is more likely to reflect actual mortuary practice than in the case of clothing fasteners. Ten individuals in the Late

[5] Buttons, cuff links, and clothing are described in Chapter 12. All of the decorative buttons, and all of the cuff links, are considered as personal adornment and hence are also discussed in Chapter 13. The enamel cuff link face from Burial 211 is illustrated in the inventory in Chapter 13. Beads, rings, and pieces of jewelry made from metal and glass are part of Chapter 13, as well.

Group were interred with miscellaneous items. Two women (Burials 230 and 242) and one man (Burial 135) had coins on their eyes. A coin and a knife were found with another man (Burial 214). Iron tacks were found with a woman (Burial 197) and a young child (Burial 138); the infant in Burial 186 had a possible nail on the left side of its cranium. The man in Burial 147 was found with a cluster of small copper rings and pins next to his right arm. Two adults (Burials 158 and 165) had portions of pipes.

9.D. Spatial distribution

Orientation

In the later grouping of burials, more graves were angled southward relative to the site grid than in the earlier or middle groupings (see discussion of orientation in Chapter 5). The pattern may be evidence for a higher frequency of winter deaths, or reliance on physical features in the northern part of the cemetery (for example, terracing along the slope of the hill), or a more regularized approach to grave digging, such that once a grave was dug, other graves were aligned to it.

The fence post alignment was oriented at approximately 102° west of grid north. If the southerly trend of Late Group burials were construed as evidence of alignment with the fence, the hypothesis that these burials post-date the fence's destruction must be rejected. There remains the possibility that a path or road extended roughly parallel to the property line, leading from Broadway to the pottery buildings that stood near the northeast part of the cemetery. The trenches identified in Lot 12 (see Chapter 4) might be related to such an access road. Such an east-west feature could have been used to orient burials.

Rows

To a greater degree than elsewhere at the site, burials in the northern area appear to form "rows" with north-south alignments. These row-like alignments can be explained in several, mutually compatible ways. First, the alignments might reflect the lay of the land, lying more or less along parallel "terraces" on the sloping ground. This may be supported by the somewhat more regular orientation of graves. Second, the row-like alignments might indicate that the day-to-day management of the cemetery was becoming more regularized, so that a gravedigger sited graves, rather than the mourners themselves. Regularization of gravesites is also compatible with our idea that the northern area was used during the British occupation and contains many individuals from outside the local community. The grouping of graves in regard to known social ties such as kinship or residence would not always have been possible under the circumstances of war. Finally, the arrangement may reflect a pragmatic response to a heightened mortality rate. The war and the appalling health conditions in the town would have raised the death toll and possibly required several burials on a single day. Similarly, the yellow fever that plagued the city annually beginning in 1791 may have taken lives at a rate requiring that several graves be prepared at once.

Paired burials

A woman-infant co-interment, Burials 12 and 14, was found in a relatively separate location in the southwest part of the site (Figure 9.2b), and child Burials 225 (of a six-to-twelve-month-old) and 252 (of an eighteen-month old) form another pair in the northern area of the site (Figure 9.2c, at the east edge of former Lot 15). While there is no way to know, the pairs may have been victims of the yellow fever epidemics of the 1790s.

Burials 137 and 165 in the northern area of the excavated site (Figure 9.2c, straddling the line between former Lots 14 and 15) may have been placed together deliberately, since the two are spatially separate from other interments within an apparent row. Burial 137 was between twenty-five and thirty-five years old and of undetermined sex; Burial 165 was an adult for whom neither sex nor precise age could be determined. Burial 137, which had a coffin, overlay Burial 165, which did not; the later burial did not disturb the earlier, however.

Burials 243 and 305 are the only other likely paired burials in the Late Group (Figure 9.2d, on the line between former Lots 16 and 17). They were very unusual if in fact they were deliberately buried together: the infant (in Burial 305) was beneath the adult (Burial 243), a man between forty and fifty years of age.

Gendered space

We have noted that the predominance of men in the later burials and their greater frequency in coffin-less burials is to be expected due to the presence of soldiers and laborers during the British occupation. Do the coffin-less burials of exhibit any spatial patterning by gender? There were three women's graves (Burials 223, 150, and 199) aligned roughly parallel in a north-south line at approximately 75E (Figure 9.2c, center). Other burials in this possible "row" include two to the north (Burials 137 and 165) for which sex could not be determined, and another to the south (Burial 211) identified as a probable male. A "row" of four men's graves lay to the east of the women, two in coffins and two without (Burials 194, 191, 174, 158, also Figure 9.2c). Another possible row of men's graves, mainly without coffins, lay somewhat further east (approximately at 130E; Figure 9.2d, within former Lot 17), and included Burials 337, 354, 327, 369, 329, and 343. (A woman's grave, Burial 342, intervened).

These rows of adjacent burials of the same gender are distinctive in comparison to the overall demographic distribution within the excavated site (Figure 1.7). The apparent non-random distribution of men may be related to specific historical circumstances. Men from the barracks, for instance, may all have been buried in a row if sickness claimed several lives in quick succession. Infectious and contagious diseases notoriously ravaged the troop barracks and prisons during the occupation. The cluster of women comprises only three individuals, so it may simply be the random result of normal day-to-day cemetery use. The possibility that gendered space within the cemetery had a religious basis should be considered, but there is no documentary or comparative evidence to provide hypotheses.

Isolated infants

No children were identified as having been buried without coffins, and while many adults came to the city from other geographical locales during the final period of the burial ground's use, children were likely to have had family members who could provide for their funerals. On the other hand, there were several spatially separate child burials in the northern part of the excavated cemetery, suggesting that these children's families may not have had their own places of burial within the cemetery. Detached child burials in the northern area include Burials 59 and 86, in the rear of Lot 12 (Figure 9.2b). Although interred in an apparent north-south row, the children are aligned to, but not clearly associated with any of the adult interments nearby. Burials 173 and 190 similarly appear to be aligned in a row but not definitely coupled with adult burials (Figure 9.2c, approximately 100E), and Burials 166, 187 and 386 may also fall into the category of "detached" child burials that may be associated with rows. It is possible, of course, that the children were placed near adults with some specific association within the apparent rows.

Even more isolated are Burials 201, 138, 183, 184, 186, and 363 in the west- and east-central site areas. Burials 183, 184, and 186 (Figure 9.2c-d) lay within the central part of Lot 16 where few burials were found, and it is possible disturbances obliterated nearby interments. But it would be unusual for these child burials to have better preservation than those of adults. Here is an area that may have been used specifically for the burial of children.

The area of the animal bone dump

Burials in the area where animal bone (mainly cow, likely tannery waste) had been dumped are shown in Figure 4.3. The faunal material found in each grave shaft in this area is inventoried in Appendix E. We examined the distribution of these graves in relation to the presence/absence of coffins and in terms of burial superposition to determine whether the tannery dump can provide a relative dating sequence in the area. There were 22 grave shafts containing significant amounts of cow bone, and these must have been dug after the dumping had occurred. Of these, 9 were adult burials with coffins, 6 were adult burials without coffins, and 5 were children's burials, the latter all with coffins. Thus both coffined and coffin-less burials occurred after the dumping episode(s). It is likely the tannery dump dates to some time during the occupation. Therefore, it is *possible* we have some burials that were placed within the dump area during the occupation (coffin-less) and some burials that were placed within the dump area after the war, during the mid-1780s (coffined). There were only two cases of burial superposition among those with tannery waste. In one case, two burials, coffin-less Burial 243 and coffined Burial 241, both truncated coffin-less Burial 185 – the coffined burial may be the latest. In the second case, a coffin-less burial (Burial 323) overlay a coffin burial (Burial 354), which argues *against* a coffin-less wartime vs. coffined post-war sequence within the dump. However, as we discuss in section 9.E, Burial 323 is a unique interment, one that probably occurred under inauspicious circumstances not related to the war, probably in the mid to late 1780s.

Area within Lot 17

A slight increase in the density of graves can be seen in the small area that was excavated eastward of grid line East120'. This is approximately the western boundary of Lot 17, surveyed originally in 1784 and available for lease after 1787, when the Barclay property was subdivided. It is possible this lot continued in use for burials after 1788 while those to its west did not, the latter having been fenced off (see Chapter 4). Another explanation for the increased overlap in burials is topography: this may have been one of those areas of flatter ground that was used more intensively than the slope. Because the central and northern portions of Lots 17, 18, 20 and 21 were not excavated fully, it is impossible to determine whether the concentration of burials in these eastern lots supports the idea that they were used for a longer period of time than Lots 12 through 16.

9.E. Unique and unusual burials

Burial 183: Head-to-east, possible painted coffin

Burial 183 was one of two excavated child burials with its heads toward the east rather than the west (the other was Middle Group Burial 406). The grave, located in the north-central part of the site, held a six-to-twelve-month old in a tiny-shouldered coffin. As noted, it was an isolate burial, with no apparent relationship to any other. Coffin wood preservation was excellent (Figure 9.5), and samples were identified as cedar and spruce. Excavators noted flecks of possible paint over the entire surface of the coffin lid and a concentration of orange/red color on the north side.[6] Fifteen straight pins were recorded *in situ* in the burial, distributed the full length of the remains.

Figure 9.5.
In situ photograph of exposed coffin lid, Burial 183. North is to the left, and the ruler is measured in feet. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

[6] Field records indicated that a sample was collected, but it was not brought to the attention of the conservators or inventoried by Howard University Archaeology Team laboratory staff. Consequently, the substance was never analyzed.

Burial 194: Wooden grave marker

A cedar board was attached to the head of the coffin in Burial 194. The vertical board was the remnant of a grave marker that would have extended to the ground surface, a unique find at the African Burial Ground (see Chapter 5 on other types of grave markers). The coffin, which was shouldered and made at least partly of cedar, held a man between thirty and forty years. His central incisors had been filed. Tooth modification is sometimes interpreted as a sign of birth in Africa, though tooth modification in Diaspora contexts should also be considered (see Goodman et al. 2004 [Chapter 6 of the Skeletal Biology Report]). Burial artifacts included a single copper-alloy button shank and an organic fragment, possibly a leather button cover, found near the head of the right femur. Pollen analysis suggested that flowers of the Liguliflorae family might have been placed on the coffin.

Figure 9.6.
In situ photograph of Burial 194 showing wood from the coffin bottom and the vertical board at the head end. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

Burial 196: Displaced legs and an opened coffin

Burial 196 held the remains of an individual of undetermined sex whose calculated age range was from twenty to twenty-four. The western end of the grave shaft and the coffin had been disturbed, and the skeletal elements from the upper body, though all accounted for, were displaced and shifted eastward within the coffin. The leg bones were found as shown in Figure 9.7, as though the legs had been severed at the knees, with the tibiae and fibulae offset next to the femurs.

The state of the coffin in this burial may help explain the disposition of the bones. Coffin lid nails were found in place *only* at the foot corners; the other lid nails appear to have been removed: a small pile of nails was found alongside the north edge of the coffin, near the top, and another cluster of nails was removed from the corresponding area beneath the coffin. It is possible the coffin was opened and the lid replaced without the nails. The coffin may have been tipped on end some time after decomposition, causing the

bones to shift toward the foot. This *might* account for the position of the leg bones, providing the shifting followed at least partial soft-tissue decomposition.[7]

The possibility that the deceased had been dismembered at the knees prior to or after death is also considered, though no visible cut marks were noted by the skeletal biology team. The positions of the leg bones appear too precisely in tandem to have simply slid into this arrangement when the coffin was disturbed. It is also possible that the hands had been behind the deceased's back at the time of burial, which would point to possible execution.

The coffin bottom was of unusual construction (see Chapter 10). Instead of lengthwise boards, short crosswise-boards had been used, nailed from the bottom into the coffin sides. The unique coffin, possibly of ad hoc construction, along with the apparent opening of the receptacle some time after interment, the shifting of the remains, and the disconcerting leg position, suggest unusual circumstances surrounding the death and burial of the individual in Burial 196.

Figure 9.7.
In situ photograph of Burial 196. The ruler alongside the burial is measured in feet, and north is to the right. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

[7] Ubelaker (1974:28-31) has analyzed frequencies of partial disarticulation, reflecting the strength of muscle or ligament attachments. His results suggest that

> decomposition produces separation first at the major joints such as the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, and knee. Separation next occurs at the joints between the sacrum and pelvis, bones of the hand, lower leg and foot, radius and ulna, sacrum and fifth lumbar vertebrae, skull and first cervical vertebrae, the lumbar segments, first and second cervical vertebrae, skull and mandible, and the third to seventh cervical segments. The thoracic vertebrae, tibia and fibula, and bones of the feet are the last to become disarticulated [1974:28].

Burials with skeletal elements displaced: dismemberment and dissection

Like Burial 196, Burials 151 and 364 contained skeletons with bones placed in puzzling ways. Burial 151 held a man between thirty-five and forty-five years old. The coffin was oriented with the head well to the southwest, outside the typical range at the excavated cemetery. Excavators noted that the right leg was turned "backward." It is possible the leg had been severed (before or after death) and placed in the coffin in this position. The man's incisors had been filed to points. A single pin, found at the neck, was recovered from the burial.

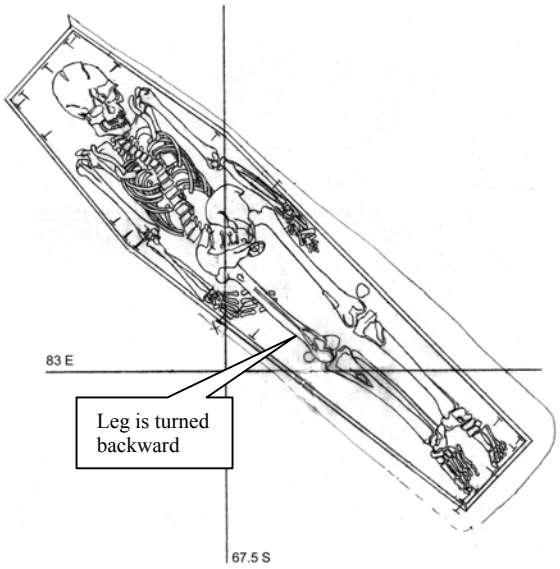

Figure 9.8. (left)
Drawing of Burial 151 *in situ*. North is to the right. Note the southwesterly orientation. Scale: 1 inch = 2 feet. Drawing by M. Schur.

The bones in Burial 364 were even more mystifyingly arranged. The remains were of a man between twenty-five and thirty-five years old, buried with no coffin. The right ulna and radius (the bones of the forearm) were found in the left lower leg area, end-to-end, where the tibia should have been, and the left tibia was rotated 180 degrees and placed at the inside of the left femur. The left arm bones were flexed at a sharp angle. The left foot overlay the distal end of the left fibula. The hand bones were found scattered in the torso area. Skeletal analysis revealed indirect evidence of a gruesome scenario: the left hand and possibly the right, as well as the forearms, had been severed near the time of the man's death. Old cuts or abrasion of bone on the top of the left ulna and dark cut-marks consistent with a sharp blade on the top of the left radius might have been made just before or after death. Darkened blade cuts were also found on the distal (hand) end of the left radius. This cannot be a case of simple dismemberment, however. The left fibula was in its correct anatomical position,

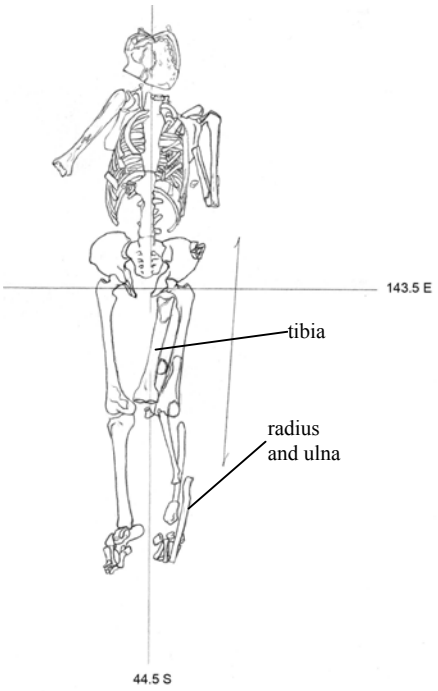

Figure 9.9.
Drawing of Burial 364 *in situ*. The vertical line to the right of the remains represents the edge of the grave shaft. North is to the right, and the scale is 1 inch = 2 feet. Drawing by W. Williams.

but the tibia was not, and the displaced, right lower-arm bones were not adjacent to each other but laid end-to-end.

One explanation for the position of the bones is that the remains represent a stolen cadaver (perhaps from the burial ground) that had been partially dissected and subsequently interred with the bones from the severed elements. We cannot know who performed the burial, but it is possible family and friends of the deceased, or other citizens among the many who decried the practice of dissection, retrieved the body and laid it to rest. Since we know that African New Yorkers assumed active vigilance over their dead (see section 9.A, and Chapter 2), it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that they made efforts to retrieve bodies, which then would have been afforded proper burial.

Figure 9.10.
In situ photograph of Burial 323 skeletal remains as found. The top of the skull was held in the man's arms. North is to the left, and the ruler is in feet. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

One other grave in the Late Group raises issues of the appropriation of bodies after death. Burial 323 held a man between nineteen and thirty years of age who had been subjected to post-mortem surgery in which the top of the skull had been sawn off. He had been placed in his grave with the top of his skull held in his arms upon his torso. Possibly his body had been obtained for dissection and perhaps the family or friends were able to retrieve the body and bury it. It is also possible that a coroner's inquest had been performed on the body, since sectioning of the cranium was typical of an autopsy in the 18th century (Sledzik and Micozzi 1997:488; for archaeological examples from Great Britain, see Chamberlain 1999). The position of the body, with the head to the east rather than the west, is very unusual (only four instances were recorded at the African Burial Ground), and supports the overall impression of inauspicious circumstances of burial. So, too, may the absence of a coffin.[8]

[8] New York City coroner Thomas Shreve's 1771 petition to the Common Council for recovery of fees lists 20 inquests performed but does not indicate whether autopsies were undertaken. The petition does itemize extra fees incurred for burials, and Shreve charged for having to dig two graves himself. In only one case was there a charge for a coffin, implying that the others were buried without coffins (Papers of the Common Council, Petitions, Thomas Shreve, April 19, 1771).